



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

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## **Secretary of the Interior Honors Hawaii Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program**

**WASHINGTON** – Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton today presented one of her “Four C’s Awards” to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Islands Conservation Partnership Program during the U.S. Department of the Interior’s 62<sup>nd</sup> Department Honor Awards Convocation in Washington, D.C. The award recognizes the staff’s efforts in working with landowners and conservation organizations to benefit Hawaii’s native ecosystems.

“Those being honored today have made all of us proud. They have gone beyond the decision to serve. They have made their choice their calling,” Secretary Norton remarked in opening the ceremony. “For some, the choice was made in a heartbeat. They stepped up into a firestorm or jumped into a rescue. Others spent decades in service: doing more than required – or even desired – day after day, year after year.”

Craig Rowland, program coordinator for Pacific Islands Conservation Partnership Programs, accepted the award on behalf of his staff, including Chris Swenson, Benton Pang, Naomi Bentivoglio, Stephanie Bennett, Donna Ball, and Bret Harper.

Through their efforts in 2003, almost \$2.7 million in cost-share funds, technical assistance, and coordination were provided to community groups, private landowners, conservation organizations, and other government agencies with the overall goal of benefitting Hawaii’s native ecosystems. This funding was matched by contributions or in kind services totaling more than \$2.2 million, bringing almost \$5 million to conservation programs in the state. In 2004, more than \$3.1 million was awarded through Fish and Wildlife Service grant programs, leveraged by approximately \$2.5 million from outside sources.

During her four years as Interior Secretary, Ms. Norton has promoted the use of the “Four C’s”: cooperation, consultation, and communication in conserving the Nation’s resources. The Secretary’s Four C’s Award is granted to a Department of the Interior employee – or a group or team of employees – who demonstrate exceptional contributions, methods, and efforts to promote the Secretary’s initiatives. An individual or group/team nominated for this award must demonstrate excellent communicative relationships with all stakeholders involved in decisions that concern our nation’s natural resources, creating win-win situations for stakeholders, as well as for the environment. A special certificate and citation signed by the Secretary are presented to the recipients.

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“While this award is given to our program and staff, we want to recognize the tremendous support we’ve been given in Hawaii by local landowners, community groups, watershed partnerships, and others,” Rowland said. “We all share a collective interest in restoring native habitats here in Hawaii, not only to benefit our native plants and animals but present and future generations of Americans. If it weren’t for the willingness of our partners to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service, we would not be receiving this award today.”

The Conservation Partnerships Program oversees six grant programs, including one of the most unique partnership programs in the Nation: the Hawaii Community Conservation Initiative. The program was initiated in Fiscal Year 2002 as a collaborative effort to reduce longstanding conflicts between hunting programs and endangered species protection. Key requirements of the program are that it empowers local communities and employ local citizens to implement projects that reduce feral animal pressure on endangered species or reduce endangered species regulation on hunting activities, or both.

According to the award citation, during its short existence, this program has resulted in not only a closer relationship with local community members, but a newfound recognition that both hunting and endangered species programs are valuable to Hawaii’s people. Although conflicts may still arise occasionally, the staff’s efforts are engendering a growing sense of commitment to working together for the benefit of all.

Through the Pacific Islands Conservation Partnership programs, native habitat restoration activities are now underway on more than a half million acres within main Hawaiian Islands – more than one-eighth of the State’s land base. The partnership program also is expanding its efforts beyond Hawaii to other island ecosystems within the Pacific. Coastal Program grants are already aiding the Republic of Palau, the Territory of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia. The program’s annual reports are available on the Internet at [www.pacificislands.gov](http://www.pacificislands.gov) under Habitat Conservation.

In addition to the “Four C’s” awards, the Secretary presented awards to numerous Interior employees who have shown courage in danger, dedication in service, exceptional efforts in public conservation, and invaluable behind-the-scenes contributions. A list of awards can be found on the Department of the Interior’s website at [www.doi.gov](http://www.doi.gov).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.